

**RACIAL SEGREGATION AND INEQUALITY OVER THE
AFRO-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTHERN AMERICA
REFLECTED IN KATHRYN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP*
(SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH)**



Submitted to Post Program of Language Studies
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APPROVAL

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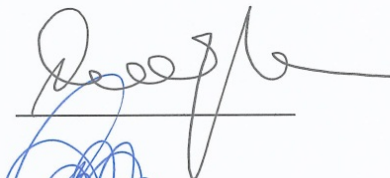
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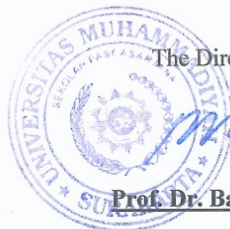
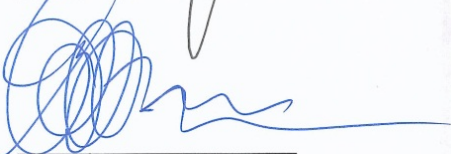
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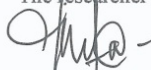
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I hereby confirm that the thesis entitled "Racial Segregation and Inequality over the Afro-American Community in Southern America Reflected in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (A Sociological Approach)" is an original and authentic work written by myself and it has satisfied the rules and regulations of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta with respect to plagiarism. I certify that all quotations and the sources of information have been fully referred and acknowledged accordingly.

I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for the award of any previous degree in any tertiary institutions in Indonesia or abroad.

Surakarta, March 5th 2018

The researcher



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RACIAL SEGREGATION AND INEQUALITY OVER THE AFRO-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTHERN AMERICA REFLECTED IN KATHRYN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP* (A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH)

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah: 1) mendeskripsikan indikator segregasi rasial dan ketidaksetaraan komunitas Afro-Amerika di Amerika Selatan dalam *The Help*; 2) menggambarkan segregasi rasial dan ketidaksetaraan komunitas Afro-Amerika di Amerika Selatan yang digambarkan dalam *The Help*; dan 3) menjelaskan mengapa penulis secara khusus membahas pemisahan rasial dan ketidaksetaraan dalam *The Help*. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan oleh peneliti adalah penelitian kualitatif deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: pertama, indikator segregasi rasial dan ketidaksetaraan mengenai komunitas Afro-Amerika di Amerika Selatan dalam *The Help* terdiri dari 6 (enam) indikator: perumahan terpisah, fasilitas terpisah, hierarki rasial / stereotip, pemisahan kamar mandi dengan asumsi Orang kulit hitam membawa penyakit, segregasi dalam pelayanan publik, dan segregasi dalam kebijakan publik. Kedua, segregasi rasial dan ketidaksetaraan komunitas Afro-Amerika di Amerika Selatan yang digambarkan dalam *The Help* melalui karakter dalam novel tersebut digambarkan melalui keberadaan karakter kulit putih dan karakter kulit hitam. Gaya yang digunakan oleh penulis untuk menggambarkan segregasi bersifat retorik. Dalam peristiwa, segregasi rasial dan ketidaksetaraan digambarkan: pembantu Afrika Amerika diperlakukan sebagai 'manusia tercela' meskipun mereka adalah ibu pengganti orang kulit putih; Hukuman bagi orang-orang yang mendukung persamaan ras; perasaan cinta antara anak-anak kulit putih dan pengasuh mereka, namun terhambat oleh perbedaan warna kulit; Cinta seperti ibu dan anak perempuan seperti yang digambarkan dalam hubungan Aibileen dan Mae Mobley; dan perasaan sebagai teman dekat sebagaimana tercermin dalam hubungan Constantine dan Skeeter. Ketiga, penulis secara khusus membahas pemisahan rasial dan ketidaksetaraan dalam *The Help* karena beberapa alasan: ekspresi penyesalan pengalaman masa lalu dan ekspresi kasih sayang terhadap orang lain.

Kata kunci: segregasi rasial, ketidaksetaraan, komunitas Afro-Amerika.

ABSTRACT

The objectives of the study are: 1) to describe the indicators of racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American community in South America in *The Help*; 2) to describe racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American community in South America depicted in *The Help*; and 3) to describe why the author specifically address the racial segregation and inequality in *The Help*. The type of the study used by the researcher is descriptive qualitative research. The results of the research show that: first, the indicators of racial segregation and inequality

over Afro-American community in South America in *The Help* involve 6 (six) indicators: separated housing, separated facilities, racial hierarchy / stereotyping, toiletry segregation as assumption that black people bring diseases, segregation in public services, and segregation in public policy. Second, racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American community in South America depicted in *The Help* through the characters in the novel is portrayed through the existence of white characters and black characters. The style used by the author to depict segregation is rhetorical. In events, racial segregation and inequality are portrayed in: African American maids were treated as ‘despicable human’ although they had been the whites children’s surrogate mothers; Punishment for people who promote racial equality; The growth of love feeling between white children and their nannies, but is hindered by differences of skin colors; Love feeling as mother and daughter as portrayed in Aibileen and Mae Mobley’s relationship; and the feeling as close friends as reflected in Constantine and Skeeter’s relationship. Third, the author specifically addresses the racial segregation and inequality in *The Help* because of some reasons: expression of regret of past experience and expressing affection towards others.

Keywords: racial segregation, inequality, Afro-American society.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Help, a novel by American author Kathryn Stockett, brings up race issues in the Southern US. In his research, Young (2017) states that *The Help* portrays racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American in South America. The chapters of the novel reveal the truth of what black maids think of their white employers. The black character, Aibileen, relay events showing their employers to be unreasonable and unfair to their help. Black maids were often accused of stealing and helpless to defend themselves. Their personal lives were secondary to the demands of the white family. A white woman could fire the help and used her friends and influenced to destroy a black maid's life. Aibileen also blamed the white men at the lumber mill for her son's death because they didn't get help quickly enough. This shows that the racial prejudice affects miseries on black people (Young, 2017). Kathryn Stockett explained that she wrote *The Help* as her manifestation of ‘white mistakes’ that she described in a character of Skeeter. *The Help* gives a description of historical context of racial segregation and the Afro-American Civil Rights movement (Van Wormer, et.al., 2012). Wanzo’s research (2013)

explained that *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett shows the peak of racial segregation. The book is narrated by three very different women; Minny, a black maid unable to keep a job due to her hot head, Aibileen, another black maid who was raising her seventeenth white child, and Miss Skeeter, a white woman who wanted to be a writer. She had been brought up by black maid since she was young, and wanted to find out why her much-loved maid, Constantine, had disappeared.

There is a relationship between the studies with the novel. *The Help* portrays of racial segregation and equality over Afro-American in South America. Initially, African-American segregation and oppression created the problem of poverty, the continuation of social and economic dislocation, and mostly political phenomena (Jennings, 1992:4). It is in line with a research by Seabrook and Wyatt-Nichol (2016) that there is a structural racism through a socio-historical context of institutional oppression and its effects on modern society. The epistemological framework of intersectionality is used to focus on the overlap of oppression, structural racism, and implicit bias evident in the stereotypes and perceptions of the African American male population in the United States.

In this study, the researcher describes the background of society when the author wrote the novel. It may include social, economic, political, cultural and religious aspect. By knowing the social background itself, the researcher can analyze what the author really wants to say through his work and how suffering is reflected in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. *The Kite Runner* is an interesting novel to analyze. As long as the researcher knows, there is no a research which has been conducted the study relates to the novel in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. Thus, the researcher decides to conduct a research on racial segregation and equality over Afro-American in South America in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* using Sociological Approach.

As a literary work, the novel is assumed as a mirror of a real world. As asserted by Teeuw (1984: 50) in his book *Sastra Dan Ilmu Sastra*, Abrams' frame work of literary criticism which evaluates a literary work in way of

imitation to the world known as mimetic criticism. The characters and setting within the story may represent the age, the culture and the social in a certain place. In a literary work the reader may find a character experiences a lot of conflicts. Those conflicts give a significant impact for the character's personality. The literary element that the researcher is going to analyze here is class conflicts through sociological approach. A conflict is an open clash between two opposing groups (or individuals). While, class conflict the tension or antagonism which exists in society due to competing socioeconomic interests and desires between people of different classes, in this case the oppressor and the oppressed. There are three types of conflicts, which are man versus himself, man versus society, and man versus nature (Dahrendorf, 2013). The most distinguished conflicts found in the novel are struggles between man and society, how one individual's life is determined by the society, and also conflicts between man and himself, how a new point of life has changed someone's perspectives and action.

As well as sociology, literature deals with humans in society: human effort to adapt and his efforts to change the society. In this case, the real sociology and literature share the same problem. Like sociology, literature too is pre-eminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it and his desire to change it. In fact, man and his society is the material out of which literature is constructed. So, literature is regarded as the expression or representation of human life through the medium of social creation viz. language (Wellek & Warren, 1976: 94). Thus, *The Help* novel has life of black maids in 1960s as the main issue. It can be regarded as an attempt to recreate the social world: the human relationship with his family, the environment, politics, state, and so on. In terms of pure documentary, it is clear that the novel deals with the texture of social, economic, political and also a matter of sociology.

The sociology of literature is a study of literature based on the sociological perspective that is described by the author on his or her literary

work, to understand the social phenomenon at the time. According to the Swingewood and Laurenson (1972:17) state that the sociology of literature consists of three kinds: (a) sociology of the writer or author, its study about the writer's view of the society, (b) sociology of the writer's society, its study about the influence of society to his work, and always produced in social context on which the social condition becomes the issues of his work. And (c) sociology of the reader's focuses on the influence of the literary work, how the literary work effects to the readers as a society. Laurenson and Swingewood (1972:11) states that sociology is the scientific study, objective study of man in society, and the study of social institution and of social process.

The topic of racial issues including segregation in America has been discussed in several researches. The first is a research by Renita Seabrook and Heather Wyatt-Nichol (2016). The objective of the research is to examine structural racism through a socio-historical context of institutional oppression and its effects on modern society. The epistemological framework of intersectionality is used to focus on the overlap of oppression, structural racism, and implicit bias evident in the stereotypes and perceptions of the African American male population in the United States. The findings show that four eras of socio-historical significance are addressed: 1. Foundations of Racial Oppression; 2. Racism: Reconstruction and Jim Crow; 3. Renewal: Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience; 3. Reckoning: Embedded Racism and the Criminal Justice System. A research by Fitrisari entitled Reader Response to Racism in Harper Lee's novel: *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) are aimed: to analyze the dominant issue the reader responds, to determine the relationship between the issues and the background of the reader, to find out why the reader's response is interested in the issue of racism, and to find out why readers are interested in the issue of racism. A research by Fatima Zahra Amari (2015) focuses on the issue of racism in America and its impacts on the life of African American individuals during the late of 1920's and the beginning of 1930's. It also investigates the blacks' identity and their

American experiences through Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* and the aspects of racism in this novel. It examines whether the novel written by Ralph Ellison is a narrative text that mirrors the conditions of black Americans during the Jazz Age and their struggle with racism and how the historical events and the themes of the novel interconnected, and to express the internal relation between historical events and the novel's theme. Finally, this study demonstrates different facets of racism and its consequences on the African American protagonist through his memories and experiences. The analysis of *Invisible Man* from New Historicism and Psychoanalytic literary criticism, the novel was interpreted and analyzed from the angles of these approaches, which aided the researcher to prove his hypothesis

2. METHODS

The type of the research that is used by the researcher is qualitative research. Mary (2008: 6) states that qualitative research is designated any research whose results are captured in words, images, or nonnumeric symbols. In this study, the researcher wants to describe systematically, factually, and accurately an interest of one of the intrinsic factor of novel that is racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American community in South America reflected in the novel. The researcher uses the descriptive method to analyze racial segregation and inequality. The researcher analyzed the novel through sociological approach. Sociological approach starts with a conviction that art's relations to society are vitally important, and that the investigation of these relationships may organize and deepen one's aesthetic response to a work of art. The data of this research was taken from Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* published in 2009 by Amy Einhorn's Book. The novel consists of 34 chapters and 220 pages. In this study, the data are texts that consists of words, phrases, clauses and sentences containing racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American community in South America reflected in the the novel.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Indicators of Racial Segregation and Inequality over Afro-American Community in South America in *the Help*

The indicators of racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American in *The Help* are presented based on the theory of racial segregation and discrimination by Kellogg Foundation. The indicators involves 6 (six) indicators: separated housing, separated facilities, racial hierarchy / stereotyping, toiletry segregation as assumption that black people bring diseases, segregation in public services, and segregation in public policy.

In term of households social class, the racial segregation and inequality is reflected in the gap of living place between white Americans and Afro-Americans. The novel shows how complicated employee-employer relationships become, especially those between the black women and the white children they care for. There is residential segregation between the white and Afro-Americans. The White and the Black have a separate area of housing. They do not live together. The White people have a big area, but the Black people just have a small area (Stockett, 2009:12).

One of the indicators of the racial segregation and inequality is verbal abuse that white people make against Afro-Americans. Verbal abuse is done in the form of mocking, insulting, and even assuming the black as a disease, so the need for separation of the toilet between blacks and whites. White ladies avoid the risk of the black disease and always forbid their children to near the black maids (Stockett, 2009:47). In addition to verbal abuse, black people also receive physical abuse. Physical abuses are sometimes not received directly from white ladies, but the white ladies make provocations so people commit violence against black people, for example, the black maids are fired from their

jobs, their husbands are fired from their jobs, destruction of their cars and property, and imprisonment without cause. Physical abuse also comes in form of violence. The leaders of black people who oppose racism accept violence, even death threats. As happened to Medgar Evers, leader of the NAACP (Stockett, 2009:91).

The Help shows the inner workings of a segregated society against the backdrop of the growing US Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The prejudice that white people are superior to the blacks is internalized toward community since they are babies. The novel shows that almost all the White think that the Black is dirty who can spread many kinds of diseases. The diseases are caused by the black color of skin. This problem makes the White very worry with the black disease and it becomes a problem for both the White and the Black. Aibileen and Minny as the main characters in the novel, have many bad experiences as black maids. When Aibileen works in Miss Leefolt's house, she has a separate bathroom because her lady worries that she will contaminate diseases.

The racial segregation and inequality over Afro-Americans done by the White in many aspects of life that can be seen in public services, such as: housing, bus or public transportation, hospital, library, and the others. The Black people always get the second facilities compare to the White. They are separated in the public service like in a bus. The White and the Black get the same bus, but they have separate seats (Stockett, 2009: 13). The black people have a separate hospital from the White. The Black can't come to the White hospital and the other way. The White or the Black doctors do not want to help the other skin patients (Stockett, 2009: 154). The Black and the White have separated libraries. The Black library not only has incomplete collection of books, but also the less of facilities. The Black people can't enter to the White library and the Black can't borrow books from the White libraries (Stockett, 2009: 157). The black people get minimum educational

services, facilities, and access. The school is also separated for the Black and the White. They study in different school. The black people only can enter certain schools and the white people don't allow the black people to be in the same schools.

The next aspect of racial segregation and inequality over Afro-Americans happens in public policy. In terms of people policy, there is a law that separates the White and the Black in a booklet of *Compilation of Jims Crow of the South*. The booklet rules the colored people including the Black can and cannot do, in an assortment of Southern states (Stockett, 2009: 176). The black people get injustice from the government, because they are minority. They become the second class citizens who get second facilities after the white people. They just accept the rules from government defenselessly. Both the Black and the White know about these false laws, even though they live in the same region, but they don't talk about the laws.

3.2 Depiction of Racial Segregation and Inequality

The depiction of racial segregation and inequality through the characters in the novel is portrayed through its characterization. Aibileen accepts the condition with reasonable thought. She still does her job as a maid well. The second character, Minny, faced the segregation and inequality angrily. She feels inferior and always curious with white people. Skeeter does not agree with segregation and rejects the situation through her voice in writing (Stockett, 2009:145). These three characters all evolve as people throughout the novel. However, Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter are also different in many ways. The most significant difference between the three women is their divergence in skin color and all that entails. The fact that Aibileen and Minny are colored whereas Skeeter is white separates the three characters at the start of the novel, and is a barrier that is hard to overcome, especially in Jackson,

Mississippi, where racial segregation is very present and any interaction between whites and coloreds very tense. In conclusion, the depiction of racial segregation and inequality through the characters in the novel is portrayed through its characterization. Aibileen accepts the condition with reasonable thought. She still does her job as a maid well. The second character, Minny, faced the segregation and inequality angrily. She feels inferior and always curious with white people. Skeeter does not agree with segregation and rejects the situation through her voice in writing.

The presence of racism and segregation in Mississippi and in the other southern states of America has its roots in slavery, which was brought to Mississippi via the colonial French and later on by the English and the Spanish. The novel tells that the society in this case white is very different from black. They think that blacks always to be a slave and a disgusting human. For example, Miss Leefolt wants to build bathroom for Aibileen because she think black people full of diseases, so that if they share bathroom she afraid that she will influenced the disease (Stockett, 2009:29). This setting environment is the one of the strength because the reader will interest with the character act. The reader would be more and more curious about the next story until the reader finish the novel. Besides that, the reader knows about good and bad side of each character so they get some lesson from that.

There are some events portraying racial segregation and inequality in *The Help* viewed from events: that the black are treated as 'despicable' human. The white women in the town Jackson does not only depict the injustice and rules between white and black people in Jackson, but depicts the very nature of the white women. The white women are often described as helpless beings, who are not able to raise and nurture their own children, and who lack true values like being a good parent, being able to cook and clean for their family.

Repeatedly throughout the novel, Minny, Aibileen and Skeeter want to change things. The second wave of the Women's Rights Movement, an important part of American history, lasted from the 1960s to the 1980s. During this period of time, American women fought for equal rights to those of men in different aspects of life such as education, politics, and the workforce. In *The Help*, Skeeter Phelan clearly embraces the ideals and goals of the Women's Rights Movement as she tries to escape the stereotype life society expects her to lead by aspiring to become an author and journalist. Furthermore, Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson represent the colored women of the 1960s as they try to improve their situation as colored maids in Mississippi by revealing the hardships of their lives to Skeeter.

3.3 The Reasons Kathryn Stockett Specifically Addresses the Racial Segregation and Inequality in *The Help*

As Kathryn Stockett does in her novel *The Help*, she recounted her experience as a child in the American South where Jackson's population of White and Black are equally treated, since she never saw any Black receiving his/her education. As she shared her childhood experiences of black domestic who worked in her family. Stockett emphasizes the love between the African American nannies and their white babies by portraying the biological mothers as incapable and unwilling to take care of their children, which was possibly related to Stockett's memories of her own mother. Stockett clearly projects this view into her characters. Thus, both Skeeter and Mae Mobley help heal the emptiness of their caregivers' lost children with their love, just like Stockett believed she was helping Demetrie. To add credibility to her claims, Stockett describes the love between Mae Mobley and her Black nanny in the voice of Aibileen. Stockett admits that it was just an assumption of the white children that the maids loved them

Stockett's reason addresses racial segregation and inequality in *The Help* because Stockett was inspired by relationships between African American nannies and white children in *The Help* shows that mutual love between the surrogate mothers and their white children forms the fundamental element. Stockett's memories of her Black nanny named Demetrie, are projected into the book in the form of the two white characters, that are, Mae Mobley and Skeeter. The two characters' childhoods are very much alike. They both have to deal with their uncaring biological mothers and they learn of the importance of kindness and inner beauty from their African American caretakers. Both stories bear uncanny resemblance to Stockett's own childhood, as she describes it in the afterword and the interviews. Her account seems so similar to the lives of Mae Mobley and Skeeter that their stories can be read as the development of one person, Kathryn Stockett herself.

3.4 Discussion

Van Peer (1991) stated that there was an interconnection between novel and society. To him therefore, "The production and consumption of text and discourse serve particular purposes. Apart from aesthetic ones, which are studied in poetics and stylistics, texts represent social values and traditions and relate to ideological positions originate in extra textual structures of reality and society" (Van Peer, 1991:15). He concludes that literary texts embody the societal values and contradictions associated with them. *The Help* is a novel embody the values of the whites and Afro-American society who lived together in Mississippi. *The Help* presented contradiction of the values, the pro's and contra's about racial segregation. The author takes setting in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1960 when racial segregation and inequality exist. Readers can see some racial segregation and inequality like the white people make special toilet for black people, they eat in different place and white

people live in clean and large area while Negro live in dirty and small area. This is the quote when Skeeter knows about the Hilly plan to build a bathroom for black. “*A bill that requires every white home to have a separate bathroom for colored help.*” (Stockett. 2009:9). Through that theme the readers know and feel the situation inside the story. This is why the author raises the theme in this novel, in order to bring the reader in the racial segregation and inequality situation.

According to Janken (2010), the racial segregation was a system created by white Americans to keep African Americans unequal and lived apart from whites. During the slave era when most African Americans lived in the South, it was not necessary to set boundaries to separate the blacks from them. It is similarly described in *The Help*. The novel tells that the society in this case white is very different from black. They think that blacks always to be a slave and a disgusting human. For example, Miss Leefolt wants to build bathroom for Aibileen because she think black people full of diseases, so that if they share bathroom she afraid that she will influenced the disease. This conversation above happens between Miss Leefolt and Aibileen: “*Aibileen, I have a surprise for you.*”... “*Mister Leefolt and I have decided to build you your very own bathroom.*” (Stockett. 2009: 29).

According to Wellek & Warren (1956:84), the relationship between novel and society is regarding the issue of author as producer of literary works. Concerned about social status, social ideology author, and order outside the literary author. In this case, including some factors that affects the author in creating literature. In an interview with a writer for *Bookreporter* Web site, Stockett explained her childhood in Mississippi. She said that almost every family she knew had a black woman working in their house, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the white children. Only after she moved north, she realized that her memories of her childhood were unusual. Gradually, those memories began to spark an idea and she decided to write a story about her relationship with her

family's maid when she was a child. Early on in the writing process, Stockett chose to frame her narrative from the point of view of a black maid.

According to Barry & Blassingame (1982), during the late 1800's, the Black south increasingly suffered from segregation, the loss of voting rights, and other forms of discrimination. Their condition reflected beliefs held by most southern White that the White were born superior to the Black with respect to intelligence, talents, and moral standard. Furthermore, black slaves were considered property, and were not given citizenship until Congress and the perspective States ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the constitution. The condition was reflected in *The Help*. Black people were considered as lower class that had no power. Their position was different from the White and they became the victim of racial segregation and inequality in many aspects, not only physically but also in their ways. The black people got the racial segregation and inequality because they are regarded as diseases, because they were black and dirty. They also got the discrimination in the aspects of life mainly in the public services, such as in housing, bus or public transportation, hospital, library, education and justice.

4. CONCLUSION

First, the indicators of racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American community in South America in *The Help* involve 6 (six) indicators: separated housing, separated facilities, racial hierarchy / stereotyping, toiletry segregation as assumption that black people bring diseases, segregation in public services, and segregation in public policy.

Second, racial segregation and inequality over Afro-American community in South America depicted in *The Help* through the characters in the novel is portrayed through the existence of white characters and black characters. Skeeter and Hilly as white characters face racial inequality differently. For the black characters, Aibileen accepts the condition with

reasonable thought. She still does her job as a maid well. The second character, Minny, faces the segregation and inequality angrily. She feels inferior and always curious with white people. In setting of place, racial segregation and inequality take place in Mississippi in 1960s. The style used by the author to depict segregation is rhetorical.

Third, the author specifically addresses the racial segregation and inequality in *The Help* because of some reasons: expression of regret of past experience and expressing affection towards others.

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